

## KEN FERGUSON meets the man in the RoboCop suit who talks about his movies and the breaks that eventually led to him being chosen for the part

him.

"Well, my agent sent me the script. Then I met with the director Paul Verhoeven. I told him what my thoughts about the character were. The next thing was that they were auditioning people on tape in Los Angeles. I tell you - I'm a bad, bad, *bad* auditioner and I knew that if I had to audition for it then I wouldn't get the job. Simple as that.

be taken on as RocoCop even though he realised that for most of the picture he would be hidden behind the elaborate uncomfortable make-up.

"I knew what I wanted to say with this character," he said. "It struck me as being a story about redemption. Humanity. My vision was also Paul's vision. Paul had seen me in other movies and he thought I could play it. Well, it's certainly fattened the pay cheque."

Peter thought back to his earlier days as an actor in New York when he used to look around his flat for 'pennies'. "I was starving, and I used to have to eat in the cheapest places. Fun days, though," recalled the actor born in Wisconsin but raised in Texas.

Acting wasn't his first love. Music was. "I really started in jazz," he said. His love of music was inherited from his mother's side. Four generations of her family had been musicians. His late father was a lawyer following his career as an army helicopter pilot.

Weller confessed, "I just got tired of music. It wasn't lucrative enough." He had enrolled initially at North Texas State Univer-

# PETER WELLER THE ROUTE TO ROBOCOP

**P**ETER WELLER derives some amusement from the fact that he's made it into the big league thanks to a character which gives him little opportunity to show his real face to the world. He is the man behind the image of that robotic law enforcement machine known as RoboCop, a creation formed by electronics and the human soul. Robo was once a cop named Murphy until he was violently killed, but his incredible state-of-the-art resurrection in the first *RoboCop* movie, turned him into an invincible fighting machine. But it's his invincibility that's put to the supreme test in the sequel.

What troubles Weller however is that Robo isn't exactly a character that tests his undoubted acting range all that seriously. What really challenges him is his patience and resolve. "The

first film was a nightmare to make," he said when we met. "The trouble was the suit. I just couldn't move in it when we started."

For the sequel Weller's movements are far less restricted because of a new fibreglass suit created and designed by Rob Bottin.

"How did you become RoboCop in the first place?" I asked

"I was about to do a movie for another company who flew me out to Los Angeles. I really didn't want to do that particular movie, but while I was in LA, Verhoeven wanted to meet with me again over lunch. Him, me, the writer and the producer. 'If you won't audition, then will you please at least look at a scene and move around the room,' Paul said. So I looked at the scene, said a couple of lines and moved around the room. I was terrible. Then Paul Verhoeven said, 'You're hired!'"

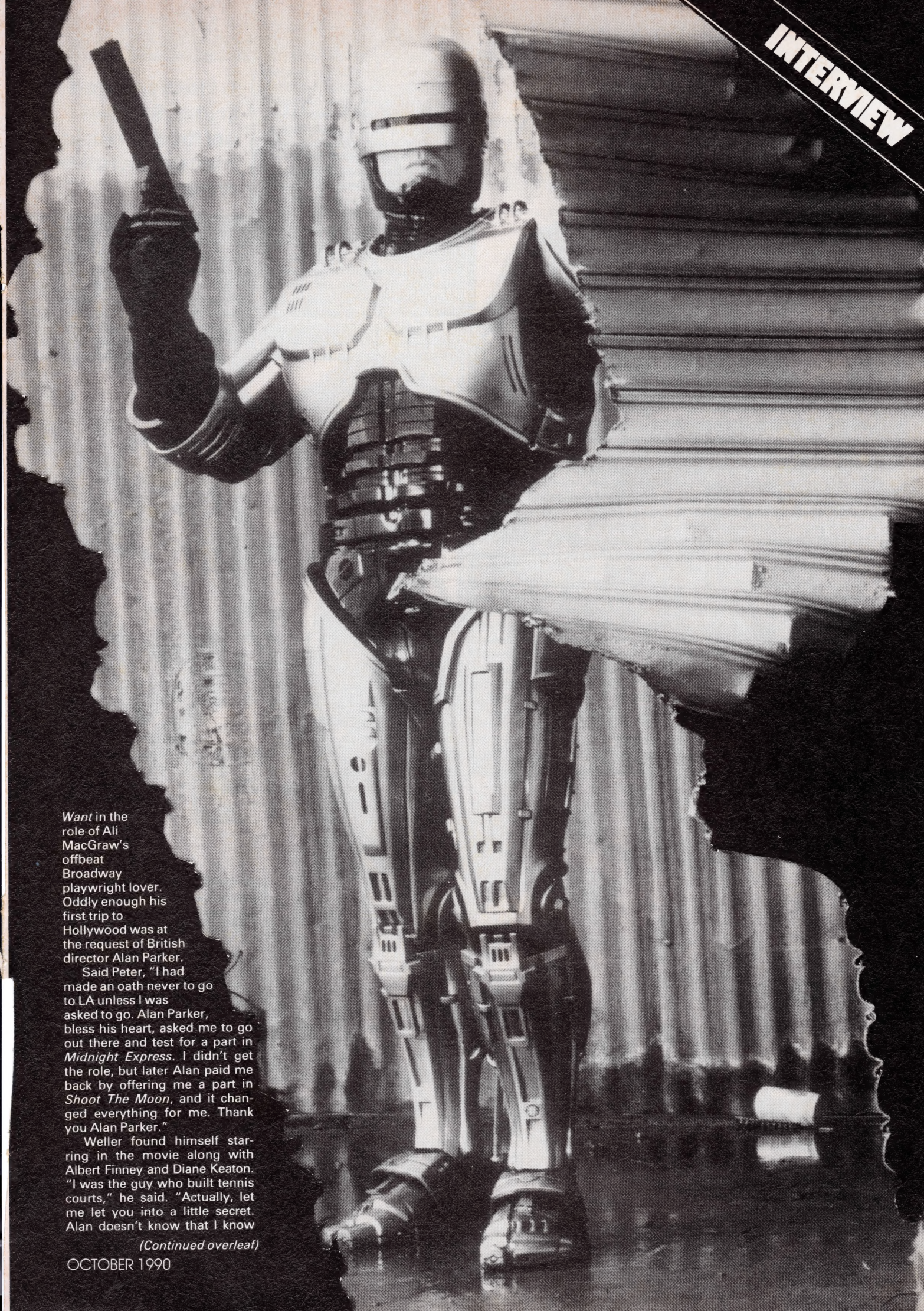
Weller, a quiet amiable personality who tends to be so laid back in his interviews that he is in danger of rolling over and falling asleep, was pleased to

sity primarily to play in one of the jazz bands. Then he switched to studying drama.

"I realised that playing jazz I could never be better than mediocre. Besides, it took so much discipline. At least in acting you can fake it."

As an aspiring young actor Weller showed tremendous promise after applying for a scholarship to the American Academy of Arts. He later studied with drama coach Uta Hagen, and then became a member of the famous Actors' Studio. A promising stage career ultimately led to movies. His first picture was *Butch And Sundance: The Early Days*. Then came Sidney Lumet's *Just Tell Me What You*





Want in the role of Ali MacGraw's offbeat Broadway playwright lover. Oddly enough his first trip to Hollywood was at the request of British director Alan Parker.

Said Peter, "I had made an oath never to go to LA unless I was asked to go. Alan Parker, bless his heart, asked me to go out there and test for a part in *Midnight Express*. I didn't get the role, but later Alan paid me back by offering me a part in *Shoot The Moon*, and it changed everything for me. Thank you Alan Parker."

Weller found himself starring in the movie along with Albert Finney and Diane Keaton. "I was the guy who built tennis courts," he said. "Actually, let me let you into a little secret. Alan doesn't know that I know

(Continued overleaf)





Weller in the recent underwater thriller, *Leviathan*

this. But we had to reshoot a scene on the porch where I first meet Diane Keaton in the movie. I was told the reason was because of a lighting problem. But I got to hear from the editor that it was because Alan had, what they call in the business, 'crossed the line' in our close-ups, which meant that instead of Diane and I looking at each other in the scene we were both looking in the same direction and not at each other. It can be an easy mistake to make.

"I was told not to let Alan know that I knew the real reason! And I never did tell him. But now, at last, I'm letting him know that I know! Anyway it gave us a chance to get that scene right because Diane and I weren't too happy with it the

first time.

"Shoot *The Moon* was a big break for me so I owe Alan a lot for giving me that chance. And working with Diane Keaton was a dream. She is the most talented individual I have ever worked with, bar none."

*Shoot The Moon* was followed by Michael Apted's *Firstborn* in which Weller starred with Teri Garr, and this was followed by George Pan Cosmatos's *Of Unknown Origin*, then by that outrageous hero, Buckaroo Banzai in *The Adventures Of Buckaroo Banzai* in which Weller starred as the brain surgeon-cum-rock-star-cum-racing driver and presidential confidant.

"Well that was the craziest, maddest thing you've ever seen in your life," he recalled. "The

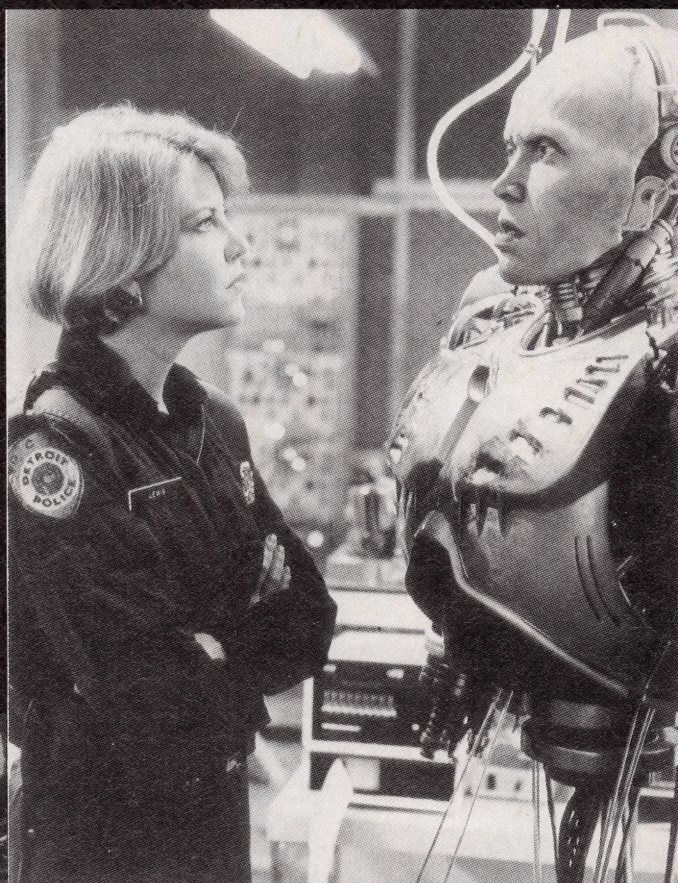
greatest time I've ever had making a movie. Just endless nuts. Madness! Yeh, it was intended as a series, but it didn't make enough money at the box-office to turn anybody on to making a sequel. But it's made a lot of money in tape sales. It's something of a cult movie.

"Buckaroo was a renaissance man and I put a lot of myself into the character. I do play the trumpet and guitar, and I do some Japanese martial arts, but I just want you to know that I'm not a physicist, or a brain surgeon, and although I have raced cars I have never driven a jet car through a mountain!"

In between his two *RoboCop*

**"I really started in jazz. But I just got tired of music. It wasn't lucrative enough"**

adventures Weller made films with Jane Seymour (*The Tunnel*); Sam Elliott (*Blue Jean Cop*); Kelly McGillis (*Cat Chaser*) and starred in the underwater drama, *Leviathan*. He has also completed *Rainbow Drive* with Sela Ward and now plans to direct and star in *Morning Glory*.



Officer Lewis (Nancy Allen) faces a shattered RoboCop

He has spent some time in Utah at Robert Redford's Sundance Institute honing up his directorial skills.

He also let me in on another of his passions — he collects teddy bears. His special bear is named Ben, a lucky mascot which goes with him on all his movies. It was given to him by his grandmother. During the filming of Lumet's *Just Tell Me What You Want*, Ben disappeared and Weller went bananas. "But the 'movie mafia' got him back for me," he said.

Ben, it could be said, has also played his part in the success story of Peter Weller. "He's certainly brought me luck," Peter said.

Robo in pieces for *RoboCop 2*

